

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	912 U Street NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 1, 2018	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	18-204	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition

The applicant, Community Three Grimke, LLC with plans prepared by Torti Gallas Urban, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a six-story mixed-use building proposed on a vacant site in the U Street Historic District. The property is at the corner of U Street and 9 ½ Street with public alleys to the east and south.

Property Description

The vacant site measures approximately 65' wide x 107' deep, located adjacent to a three-story contributing industrial building to the west and a non-contributing two-story commercial building facing 9th Street to the east. The north side of the street is characterized by contributing one- and two-story commercial buildings with brick facades and punched windows. Adjacent blocks have a variety of conditions, including small scaled commercial buildings, large scale historic buildings (such as the Prince Hall Masonic Temple, True Reformer Building, and Howard Theater), and large modern developments approved by the Board (the two buildings between 9th and 7th Street, the recently completed building at 13th and U, and the Ellington Apartments). 9-1/2 Street, a former alley, is lined on the east with a row of two- and three-story, brick flat front brick dwellings, and the Grimke School gymnasium on the west.

Proposal

The proposal calls for construction of a six-story residential building with ground level retail. The primary elevation would have a six-story bay on the western side and a narrower bay on the east. Above the canopy, a series of windows is interspersed with small projecting balconies; the patterning of punched windows would extend around to the alley elevation. The base of the building would be dark colored masonry; the upper floors would be composite panels (metal or cementitious). A new five-foot sidewalk would be provided down the east side of 9 ½ Street; surface parking will be located at the rear off the southern alley.

Evaluation

Since the designation of the U Street Historic District in 1998, the Board has reviewed numerous new construction projects on the many vacant parcels that were included within the boundaries of the district. The successful integration of taller buildings along the U Street corridor with the area's historic character has been a result of careful attention to many inner-related design characteristics. Among the most important are massing; the rhythm of fenestration and projections; elevations that express a strong vertical emphasis that relates to that of surrounding historic buildings; proportions, such as the ratio of masonry to glass; the scale of building

elements, such as openings, storefronts and projections, and the use of color, materials and detailing. As has been shown in the most successful of the large buildings that have since been built, these characteristics can come together to create a design that is urbanistically and architecturally compatible with adjacent smaller adjacent structures despite disparities in height.

While the height of the proposed building is obviously taller than its immediate neighbors, it is not an uncharacteristic or incompatible height for the district, particularly for a building of its width. The breaking down of the mass with projections of varying height and width, the rhythm of projections, and the verticality of the openings all relate to the character of historic buildings in the district.

However, as the design continues to be developed, further thought is encouraged regarding the building's dark coloration, composite panel material, and the large scale of the exterior cladding units, all of which feel foreign to and incompatible for the neighborhood. For a large building such as this to not overwhelm its immediate context, a closer relationship to the scale, coloration and materiality of the surrounding buildings is warranted. In response to this suggestion, the proposal includes a rendering of the building shown in brick (page 20) which in scale and material (if not color) could provide a good direction for achieving a better relationship. Further development of the first floor storefronts and building detailing should also continue to coordinated with HPO.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board approve the general concept as not incompatible with the U Street Historic District, contingent on further study of the scale, color, materials, storefronts and detailing.

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